Analogy and Convergence in Octavio Paz's *The Monkey Grammarian* or India as a Source of Liberation and Reconciliation

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The six years that Octavio Paz spent in India between 1962 and 1968 as Mexican ambassador were among his most productive. The period ended when he resigned in protest at the Mexican government's massacre of innocent people in Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. It is worth remembering some of the works he wrote while in India: the poems of *Ladera este*, including *Blanco*, his most ambitious and complex poem; the spatial poems of *Discos visuales*, the collective anthology *Poesía en movimiento*, a second and much revised edition of *El arco y la lira*, a new and revised edition of his early poetry contained in *Libertad bajo palabra*, the four long essays included in *Cuadrivio*, the poetic manifesto *Los signos en rotación*, some of the essays gathered in *Puertas al campo*, the book on *Claude Lévi-Strauss o el nuevo festín de Esopo*, many of the pieces included in *Corriente alterna*, the book-length item of art criticism known as *Marcel Duchamp o el castillo de la pureza*, the semiotic essay of comparative religion *Conjunciones y disyunciones*, as well as a host of texts that would be published in later years. India was not a passing phase of Paz's development: it became a life-long obsession. In his final years he gave us *Vislumbres de la India* and his indirect translations of *Kavya* (classical Sanskrit poetry).[1] Six years of personal happiness (in Delhi he met the woman who would be his companion for the rest of his life), six years that represent the full blossoming of his work that expanded in new directions and became more universal, more experimental and decidedly more avant-garde.

From the enormous output of those years two creative pieces stand out: the "open" and spatial work *Blanco* (1967), indebted to the ideas and practices of Tantra, and the unclassifiable text *El mono gramático*, written

1 His translations are made from previous translations – invariably into English – of the Sanskrit originals. Below I discuss the indirect translations or recreations that Paz includes in *The Monkey Grammarian* of some passages from traditional Indian religious and epic texts.

in the summer of 1970 in Cambridge, England, and published for the first time in French translation in 1972. Texts that deliberately blur the boundaries between genres tend to provoke perplexity. *The Monkey Grammarian* had a difficult reception. Although the original Spanish text was finally published in 1974, the French translation should be counted as the first edition because it has certain characteristics that were never reproduced again. The Swiss publisher Albert Skira requested the book for "Les Sentiers de la création", a generously illustrated collection which already had works by famous (mostly French) writers (Aragon, Ionesco, Butor, Barthes, Caillois, Ponge, Prévert, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Le Clézio, René Char, Bonnefoy, Simon, Pieyre de Mandiargues, Michaux and others) and was characterized by the close relationship between literature and painting.

The title of the French translation, *Le singe grammairien*, was chosen for the anagram between 'singe' (simio in Spanish, monkey in English) and 'signe' (signo in Spanish, sign in English). When the original Spanish text was published two years later, the author had to decide between two titles: "El simio gramático" and "El mono gramático", both of which play on other readings in Spanish: simio-símil; mono gramático-monograma. Interestingly, when he published several fragments of the book for the first time in Spanish in 1971, he chose the title "El simio gramático" (Paz 1971). The French edition, conceived in its entirety by Paz, features 77 images distributed throughout the 160 pages. These images consist of photographs and also reproductions of paintings, sculptures and drawings from East and West. Rather than serving merely as traditional illustrations, many of the images are an essential element of textual construction and an integral part of the book.[2]

Another factor that explains the problematical reception of *The Monkey Grammarian* is the general lack of interest, in Mexico at least, in Orientalism, that tradition in Western culture that produces a range of images of the East for Western consumption. In Mexico, Paz had illustrious Orientalist precursors: José Juan Tablada and Efrén Rebolledo, who saw the East in China and Japan; and José Vasconcelos, whose *Estudios indostánicos*

2 So that the reader can have an idea of the differences between the editions, the 77 images included in the French-language edition (Paz 1972) are reduced to 25 in the first Spanish edition (Paz 1974) while the final edition supervised by the poet for his complete works contains only 8 images. Paz always thought that the images were "indispensable" although he did accept a reduction in the number for the Seix Barral edition. See his letter, dated 4 July 1973, to Pere Gimferrer (Paz 1999: 47).

(1920) expressed his view of the religious mysticism of Indian philosophy. Yet Juan Goytisolo has reminded us repeatedly that the Hispanic world has shown little interest in distant cultures: the Other is invariably a source of fear rather than fascination. A passion for what is foreign is usually seen in negative terms as exotic escapism (or sometimes even condemned as *malinchismo*, an insult paramount to treason in Mexico), implying that the home culture has nothing to learn from other civilizations. Against this prison of solipsism promoted by cultural nationalism, Paz's epistemological axiom from the very beginning was always that self-knowledge is only possible through the Other.

Although in his youth he wrote a novel he never published, Paz became known as a poet and essayist who never attempted the novel. Yet he published several types of narrative prose during his long literary career. Four instalments of a diary were published in different literary magazines in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s and then there were the miscellaneous prose texts included in *¿Águila o sol?*, published in 1951, a book made up of prose poetics, short stories and prose poems. Paz always excelled at essayistic prose and his most well-known books are classic literary essays (such as *The Labyrinth of Solitude* or his book on Sor Juana, subtitled *The Traps of Faith*). He was an avid reader of novels in his youth and wrote a number of searching essays on the problems of the novel in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s. In Paz's case, it is easy to see that genre distinctions become fluid or elastic from a very early moment. His long poems tend to be both lyrical and narrative. As it is impossible to sustain this type of text without some narrative element, it could be described quite legitimately as narrative verse.

The Monkey Grammarian consists of 29 numbered fragments interspersed with images, illustrations and visual stimuli. The longest sequence is 8 pages; the shortest, 3 lines. The book, especially in the first edition, establishes a counterpoint relationship between prose sequences and visual images. Some parts of the text are actually examples of ekphrasis (verbal descriptions or interpretations of visual images); in other cases the images appear to have been added after the writing process to complement or diversify textual elements. The title refers, of course, to Hanuman, the monkey god of Hinduism, a mythological hero whose extraordinary exploits are narrated in many pages of the *Ramayana*. Hanuman continues to be one of the most popular gods of the Hindu pantheon. At the beginning of his book, Paz includes an excerpt from Dowson's *Classical Dictionary*

of Hindu Mythology, which describes Hanuman as "the ninth author of grammar". This is actually a misinterpretation of the classical text, but the point does not affect the appropriation made by Paz.[3]

In the penultimate sequence, the author explains his point of departure, the initial idea that set the text in motion:

> Al comenzar estas páginas decidí seguir literalmente la metáfora del título de la colección a que están destinadas, Los Caminos de la Creación, y escribir, trazar un texto que fuese efectivamente un camino y que pudiese ser leído, recorrido como tal. A medida que escribía, el camino de Galta se borraba o yo me desviaba y perdía en sus vericuetos. Una y otra vez tenía que volver al punto del comienzo. En lugar de avanzar, el texto giraba sobre sí mismo. (Paz 1974: 135-136)

Nothing is more simple, apparently: the traditional metaphor of life as a path that has to be walked is extended to that of the text as a path that has to be written and read. To write a text is to follow a path or invent a new path that can then be retraced by others in the act of reading. So far, so good. This is the convention at the heart of travel literature: the outsider, the traveller in a foreign land, writes an account of a journey made to a strange place. And what better place than a sanctuary, a place of religious pilgrimage. Galta, outside Jaipur in Rajasthan, is a place that Paz visited. Anyone who has been to this extraordinary site knows that Galta is a kind of ghost town, a series of ruined palaces and temples from the 18th and 19th centuries, today dilapidated and inhabited mostly by monkeys, mendicants and pariahs. There are always groups of pilgrims there and a temple is devoted to Hanuman, whose image is inscribed on at least one stone. Up to this point we could be talking about a typical Romantic cliché: the exotic stereotype of a traveller's account of a visit to a ruined temple in a foreign land. But the fascinating thing about this text is its subversion of all these traditional stereotypes, its refusal to satisfy conventional expectations.

First to be subverted is the linear progression one expects from a narrative text that presents itself as a journey (or the memory of a journey reconstructed from a distance) from A to B with descriptions of landscape, people and customs. The opening fragment plunges us into uncertainty:

3 This was pointed out by Susnigdha Dey (1979: 11). The full title of John Dowson's reference work is given in the list of works cited (Dowson 1961).

> lo mejor será escoger el camino de Galta, recorrerlo de nuevo (inventarlo a medida que lo recorro) y sin darme cuenta, casi insensiblemente, ir hasta el fin –sin preocuparme por saber qué quiere decir "ir hasta el fin" ni qué es lo que yo he querido decir al escribir esa frase. Cuando caminaba por el sendero de Galta, ya lejos de la carretera, una vez pasado el paraje de los banianos y los charcos de agua podrida, traspuesto el Portal en ruinas, al penetrar en la plazuela rodeada de casas desmoronadas, precisamente al comenzar la caminata, tampoco sabía adónde iba ni me preocupaba saberlo. No me hacía preguntas: caminaba, nada más caminaba, sin rumbo fijo. Iba al encuentro. ¿de qué iba al encuentro? Entonces no lo sabía y no lo sé ahora. (Paz 1974: 11)

We begin *in medias res* (with the initial small letter). The writer tries to retrace in his memory the path he walked in the past and he does this by trying to follow or rather invent another path: that of the writing process in the present. As there is no absolute beginning, there is no end or prefixed destination. Linear progression is undermined by circular repetition as the narrative sequence is interrupted by a meta-discourse that questions the very possibility of achieving the goal of expressing exact meaning with polysemic language. This opening paragraph starts as a potential narrative and then becomes a reflexive essay, but the following paragraph transforms our expectations yet again as the description of the journey now becomes a linguistic journey through the sound structure of language itself. If we listen, we can hear the circular repetitions of poetry, as alliterations, analogies and equivalent sounds turn in upon themselves:

> Volver a caminar, ir de nuevo al encuentro: el camino estrecho que sube y baja serpeando entre rocas renegridas y colinas adustas color camello; colgadas de las peñas, como si estuviesen a punto de desprenderse y caer sobre la cabeza del caminante, las casas blancas [...] el sabor de sal en las labios resecos; el rumor de la tierra suelta al desmoronarse bajo los pies; el polvo que se pega a la piel empapada de sudor, enrojece los ojos y no deja respirar; las imágenes, los recuerdos, las figuraciones fragmentarias –todas esas sensaciones, visiones y semipensamientos que aparecen y desaparecen en el espacio de un parpadeo, mientras se camina al encuentro de [...]. El camino también desaparece mientras lo pienso, mientras lo digo. (Paz 1974: 12)

In this constant proliferation of subordinated phrases that repeat the act of suspension, the text oscillates between narrative account, essay, and prose poem, turning inwards and outwards in its own journey of discovery. The book transcends traditional genre distinctions and affirms itself as a unique creation that has a parasitic and ironic relationship with established conventions and expectations. It plays on them only to subvert them. This

strange and meandering text transmits the idea of freedom: freedom to walk, to remember, to write, to love and to think without capitulating to external constrictions. Just as the path to Galta disappears or blends into the mountainous landscape, so the traveller gets lost, memory breaks down and the writing process wanders off in new directions. There is no (pre)fixed theme but a plurality of possibilities in constant transformation: no static substance, only dynamic process. As in Buddhism, the self is dissolved into a bundle of perceptions. The journey multiplies itself through digression and ramification, a technique similar to the one used in the *Ramayana* and other traditional epics. In conversations Paz described his text as an "antinovela" or "una pseudonovela que se destruye a sí misma todo el tiempo" or, in the last conversation I had with him, as "una exploración de la escritura y de la memoria en busca del conocimiento y en celebración de lo Otro como presencia erótica" (Paz 2005: 976, 1443).[4] He always considered it closer to his poetry and in his complete works it is no surprise to find this text included in the volume devoted to poetry.

Let us look at the second sequence (it would be inappropriate to call them chapters). In the first, the writer finds himself constantly trying to find his way back to the path to Galta only to be frustrated by his inability to remember, recreate or invent it. The second sequence introduces a sudden change. From the past and the realm of memory we are plunged into the present and what the senses try to register:

> Tras mi ventana, a unos trescientos metros, la mole verdinegra de la arboleda, montaña de hojas y ramas que se bambolea y amenaza con desplomarse. Un pueblo de hayas, abedules, álamos y fresnos congregados sobre una ligerísima eminencia del terreno, todas sus copas volcadas y vueltas una sola masa líquida, lomo de mar convulso. (Paz 1974: 13)

We gradually realise that this scene takes place in Cambridge, England. The poet is in his study, where he writes, looking out of the window that overlooks a yard, where he can see a small table, a rubbish bin and a clump of trees. Like a landscape painter he observes the scene at different times of the day in order to capture the changes in light, colour and volume. The

4 Personal communication (April 1998). In the conversation with Julián Ríos already quoted from, Paz added: "Este tratado mío se llama *El mono gramático*. No es un ensayo pero tampoco es una novela ni un cuento. Es un texto de cien páginas en el cual la novela se disuelve y se transforma en reflexión sobre el lenguaje; la reflexión sobre el lenguaje se transforma en experiencia erótica, y ésta en relato" (Paz 2005: 1443, 1445).

traveller in Galta was walking, even though this movement became circular and cancelled itself out; here the writer is stationary, sitting at his desk, registering the movement of the trees in the wind. Yet this apparent contrast eventually leads to the same thought about the paradoxical relationship between movement and stasis (the trees are both still and swaying). This is a familiar foundational image in Paz: in the first verses of *Piedra de sol* (*Sunstone*) we see "un árbol bien plantado mas danzante". The final part of this second sequence is an essay-like reflection on the meaning of the phrase "la fijeza es siempre momentánea" and here we are in the realm of pre-Socratic philosophy and its equivalent in Indian thought. The act of writing seeks to pin down what is fleeting; words never coincide with the things they name. This phenomenology of perception and expression invokes the simultaneous presence of Heraclitus and Nagarjuna.

The next sequences are faithful to this binary rhythm as they oscillate between Galta and Cambridge, India and England, East and West. We have the coexistence of two geographical and cultural spaces, two types of landscape and two types of artistic representation (visible in the images reproduced and the texts quoted). We also have the coexistence of past and present. The act of writing links these opposing realities, rendering them simultaneously present and absent.

There are four central concepts that govern the production and reception of the text: analogy, convergence, reconciliation and liberation.[5] Let me explore them in three different sequences. The first type of analogy is that which exists between language and nature. Just as the traveller is lost in the aggressive landscape and arid vegetation of Galta, so the writer finds himself trapped in the labyrinth of language, with signs severed from their referents. The sixth sequence is an extraordinary exploration of this linguistic maze in the form of a prose poem, so powerful that it has to be quoted in full:

> Manchas: malezas: borrones. Tachaduras. Preso entre las líneas, las lianas de las letras. Ahogado por los trazos, los lazos de las vocales. Mordido, picoteado por las pinzas, los garfios de las consonantes. Maleza de signos: negación de los signos. Gesticulación estúpida, grotesca ceremonia. Plétora termina en extinción: los signos se comen a los signos. Maleza se convierte en desierto, algarabía en silencio: arenales de letras. Alfabetos podridos, escrituras quemadas, detritos verbales. Cenizas. Idiomas nacientes, larvas, fetos, abortos. Maleza:

5 The central role of analogy and convergence was first pointed out by Gimferrer (1979).

> pululación homicida: erial. Repeticiones, andas perdido entre las repeticiones, eres una repetición entre las repeticiones. Artista de las repeticiones, gran maestro de las desfiguraciones, artista de las demoliciones. Los árboles repiten a los árboles, las arenas a las arenas, la jungla de letras es repetición, el arenal es repetición, la plétora es vacío, el vacío es plétora, repito las repeticiones, perdido en la maleza de signos, errante por el arenal sin signos, manchas en la pared bajo este sol de Galta, manchas en esta tarde de Cambridge, maleza y arenal, manchas sobre mi frente que congrega y disgrega paisajes inciertos. Eres (soy) es una repetición entre las repeticiones. Es eres soy: soy es eres: eres es soy. Demoliciones: me tiendo sobre mis trituraciones, yo habito mis demoliciones. (Paz 1974: 39-40)

This is the merciless self-criticism of a writer trapped in a hostile landscape (desert, jungle) and in a language equally threatening. Nature and language are momentarily fused (the repeated use of the colon expresses the equivalence of analogy), drawn together and then separated by the act of perception of a self in constant metamorphosis, fractured and confused by being anchored in a precarious present from which past experience has to be reconstructed through memory. The writing process engenders self-destruction: the personality is split, divided between Cambridge and Galta, here and there, now and then, self and Other (both the objective Other and the former self as Other). A critical conscience creates from negativity a new kind of writing as repetitious and delirious as the geometrical constructions of Galta (see Figure 1) with their mesmerizing duplications (of balconies, arches, columns, steps, domes and *chhatris*) and the abundance, on their walls, of painted scenes from the *Ramayana* (each scene is different yet also a variation of the same archetype). There is no stable, fixed identity: the self is dissolved into a sequence of endless metamorphoses and repetitions, like Hanuman (who has the ability to constantly change his size and appearance), like the architecture of Galta reproduced in a single photograph which is repeated at intervals four times with different types of distortion.

Several fragments recreate scenes from the *Ramayana*; others describe paintings reproduced, such as one from Rajasthan depicting animal and human copulation; yet others continue to describe the landscape, architecture and people of Galta with the sheer rock, temples, pilgrims, pariahs, monkeys and sadhus (all feature in photographs, as if language were insufficient and had to be complemented by images), with switches to the scene observed through the window in Cambridge, also complemented by a reproduction of a landscape painting by John Constable. The entrance

Figure 1. One of the palaces in Galta (November 2010).
Photograph by Anthony Stanton

gate (in Galta) and the window (in Cambridge) function as thresholds to another dimension: walking through the gate or looking through the window are rites of passage that trigger access to another reality.[6]

In more than one sense the creator is also a translator (for Paz there is no essential difference between creation and translation, both in the linguistic and non-linguistic senses of the latter term). Let us look at the two sequences of the book that are actually translations from sacred texts of the Hindu tradition. At the end of each of these sequences (fragments 10 and 15) the sources are identified by the author so that the curious reader can compare the recreations with the original texts. Although it is identified as proceeding from *sarga* 9 of the *Sundarakanda*, the fifth of the seven *kandas*

6 The structural importance of the gate and the window was first pointed out by José de la Colina (1975).

or books of the *Ramayana*, fragment 10 is in fact a synthetic rendition of different verses from *sarga* 7 (verses 30 to 61-62). As we do not know which translation Paz used, it is possible that his English or French source was based on one of the many different regional variations of the Sanskrit text.

The *Sundarakanda*, often viewed as the core or centre of the whole *Ramayana*, begins with a detailed description of Hanuman's great leap across the ocean (after expanding himself to gigantic proportions) to the fortress city of Lanka, where Sita is being held by the demon king Ravana. Hanuman (the monkey hero and warrior who is also a god) is an emissary of Rama and his mission is to rescue Sita, the beloved queen, and take her back to Rama, her husband. Using all his considerable attributes (strength, speed, courage, wisdom, grammatical learning) and his supernatural assets (his extraordinary ability to change size at will), Hanuman reaches Lanka and, after contracting to minute dimensions, he slips into the luxurious palaces of Ravana's harem at night to search for Sita.

In the scene chosen, as if it were through the objective lens of a camera, we see everything with great immediacy through the eyes of Hanuman (whose non-sexual virility is in stark contrast to the libertine Ravana).[7] The courtesans are asleep, extenuated after their activities: "Vio a muchas mujeres tendidas sobre esteras, en variados trajes y atavíos, el pelo adornado con flores; dormían bajo la influencia del vino, después de haber pasado la mitad de la noche en juegos" (Paz 1974: 57). This is a scene described as part of the "erotic crescendo" by the editors and translators of the critical edition of the classic epic in English (Goldman/Sutherland Goldman 1996: 50). The erotic atmosphere demands an erotic language and this analogical idiom identifies the women with nature:

> Aquellas mujeres eran ríos: sus muslos, las riberas; las ondulaciones del pubis y del vientre, los rizos del agua bajo el viento; sus grupas y senos, las colinas y eminencias que el curso rodea y ciñe; los lotos, sus caras; los cocodrilos, sus deseos; sus cuerpos sinuosos, el cauce de la corriente. (Paz 1974: 57-58)

Hanuman's perception of this atmosphere of rich sensuality and erotic transgression is that of the grammarian who sees in the intertwining of

7 Sexual continence is one of the characteristics of Hanuman: "Valmiki's conception of the character of Hanuman is of a virile, but largely de-eroticized, figure whose libidinal energies are sublimated in the service of his master" (Goldman/Sutherland Goldman 1996: 55).

bodies an analogical equivalent of another sign system, that of the profusion of intertwining branches and plants in the natural world:

> Algunas de estas muchachas saboreaban los labios y las lenguas de sus compañeras y ellas les devolvían sus besos como si fuesen los de su señor; despiertos los sentidos aunque el espíritu dormido, se hacían el amor las unas a las otras [...] y así se acoplaban las unas con las otras como las ramas de una misma arboleda. Aquellas mujeres de talles estrechos se entrelazaban entre ellas al modo de las trepadoras cuando cubren los troncos de los árboles y abren sus corolas al viento de marzo. Aquellas mujeres se entretejían y encadenaban con sus brazos y piernas hasta formar una enramada intrincada y selvática (Paz 1974: 58).

It is worth remembering that these qualities of profuseness, digression and complementary repetition, seen here in the spheres of eros and nature, are also features of all oral narrative poetry in the epic tradition. Hanuman deciphers culture and nature according to a mythical and religious vision of the universe as a system of correpondences. In another sequence we hear the monkey-god's thoughts:

> Logré reducir el boscaje a un catálogo. Una página de enmarañada caligrafía vegetal. Maleza de signos: ¿cómo leerla, cómo abrirse paso entre esta espesura? Hanuman sonríe con placer ante la analogía que se le acaba de ocurrir: caligrafía y vegetación, arboleda y escritura, lectura y camino. (Paz 1974: 46-47)

As a monkey, a human, a god and a grammarian, Hanuman has a unique perspective that allows him (and us) to perceive relationships between the human and the divine. His thoughts, expressed by the poet-essayist-narrator, articulate a worldview that resonates in Paz (and in other writers, such as Borges):

> La diferencia entre la escritura humana y la divina consiste en que el número de signos de la primera es limitado mientras que el de la segunda es infinito; por eso el universo es un texto insensato y que ni siquiera para los dioses es legible. La crítica del universo (y la de los dioses) se llama gramática. (Paz 1974: 47)

Fragment 15 is clearly identified as a passage from the *Satapatha-Brahmana* (11-4-3), the great compendium of the mythic vision and ritual ideologies and practices of Vedism and Brahmanism. Paz probably used the Julius Eggeling translation into English of the five volumes of the work in the series "Sacred Books of the East", published between 1882 and 1900 and reprinted in Delhi in 1963. The passage chosen, subtitled "The

Mitravinda Sacrifice" in Eggeling's version, tells how, while creating all living beings, Prajapati engendered the goddess Sri ('prosperity' or 'splendour' in Sanskrit). In their jealousy the other gods wanted to kill her, but Prajapati stopped them by saying: "Surely, that Sri is a woman, and people do not kill a woman, but rather take (anything) from her (leaving her) alive" (Eggeling 1963: 62). When the other gods plundered her gifts, Sri complained to Prajapati and he replied: "Do thou ask it back from them by sacrifice!" (Eggeling 1963: 62). The passage then lists the ten sacrificial offerings that the ten gods are obliged to provide (food, royal power, universal sovereignty, noble rank, power, holy lustre, dominion, wealth, prosperity, beautiful forms). Thus, the ten gifts taken from Sri (Splendour) are restituted to the goddess. Paz's translation is a synthesis that does not reproduce the parallelistic formulas of each offering or the names of the gods or the gifts, but rather concludes with the decisive formula that reveals the analogical relationship between the ten deities, the ten sacrificial dishes, the ten offerings, the ten presents to priests and the verses of ten syllables that express the prayer: "En esta secuencia litúrgica hay diez divinos, diez oblaciones, diez recompensas, diez porciones del grupo del sacrificio y el Poema que la dice consiste en estrofas de versos de diez sílabas. El Poema no es otro que Esplendor" (Paz 1974: 81-82).

Far from being an archaeological or historical interest in religious texts, the passage translated is an integral part of *The Monkey Grammarian* since Esplendor is both a symbolic character and a real woman who accompanies the poet on his journey to Galta.[8] The most erotic passages of the book are centred on the figure of Esplendor, as occurs in sequence 11, one of the most daring and explicit descriptions of the erotic act and a reflection on its meaning.[9] The act is both a concrete experience and a symbolic representation. Esplendor and her companion engage in the

8 One precise detail permits us to identify Esplendor with Marie José Tramini, the woman the poet met and married in India. After an initial separation, the couple re-encountered each other by chance near a street corner in the centre of Paris, an event that confirmed the poet's belief in André Breton's theory of "objective chance" as the explanation of the intersection of subjective desire and external causality. In *The Monkey Grammarian* the event is explicitly mentioned as a personal memory: "Miro a Esplendor y a través de su rostro y de su risa me abro paso hacia otro momento de otro tiempo y allá, en una esquina de París, entre la calle de Bac y la de Montalembert, oigo la misma risa" (Paz 1974: 118).

9 The passage is so explicit that, in a letter to Gimferrer, the author (Paz 1999: 62) feared the intervention of the censor that had to vet all books under the Franco regime. As it happens, the book was published by Seix Barral without any supressions.

erotic act as their bodies merge and penetrate each other, but at the same time they can see the projection of their actions represented on the wall as a ritual theatre of signs, a series of metamorphoses and transformations that are variations of an underlying archetype:

> Inagotable fluir de sombras y formas en las que aparecían siempre los mismos elementos –sus cuerpos, sus ropas, los pocos muebles y objetos de la habitación– cada vez combinados de una manera distinta aunque, como en un poema, había reiteraciones, rimas, analogías, figuras que reaparecían con cierta regularidad de oleaje. (Paz 1974: 61)

Once again, the logic of eroticism is the logic that governs the poem and the movements of nature. The erotic act is also an imaginary representation, a ritual of ceremonial fragmentation and reconstitution, a sacrificial game that recalls the creation of Sri (Esplendor):

> [...] nunca el cuerpo sino sus partes, cada parte una instantánea totalidad a su vez inmediatamente escindida, cuerpo segmentado descuartizado despedazado, trozos de oreja tobillo ingle nuca seno uña, cada pedazo un signo del cuerpo de cuerpos, cada parte entera y total, cada signo una imagen que aparece y arde hasta consumirse, cada imagen una cadena de vibraciones, cada vibración la percepción de una sensación que se disipa [...]. (Paz 1974: 63-64)

This is a difficult attempt to express the inexpressible and paradoxical sensation of the nature of eroticism as an experience: a rhythmical series of transformations that link plurality and unity, fragmentation and totality, stasis and metamorphosis.

To understand the relationships between text and image, there is no better example than sequence number 20. It starts with the now familiar situation of the view of the garden through the window in Cambridge, but this objective vision is soon transformed by the imagination into a scene of fantasy. The perceptions of the writer and reader are now complemented by a third perspective, that of Richard Dadd (1817-1886). What follows is a formidable essay in art criticism: two and a half pages that describe and interpret *The Fairy-Feller's Masterstroke* (see Figure 2), a painting worked on for nine years by the Victorian artist Richard Dadd, recluded in an asylum in London in the middle of the nineteenth century. The painting, reproduced in all editions of the book, is still in the Tate Gallery in London, where Paz saw it a short time before writing.

Figure 2. Richard Dadd, The Fairy-Feller's Master-Stroke, 1855-1864, oil on canvas, © Tate, London 2014

A promising young artist who had studied at the Royal Academy, celebrated as a "poet among painters",[10] Dadd was recognised for his technical mastery of precise detail and his ability to create autonomous worlds of fantasy governed by harmony and magic. In 1842 he left England for ten months and travelled through Europe and the Near East, where he painted Orientalist scenes and showed the first signs of madness. When he returned to England, his mental state continued to deteriorate and one evening he killed his own father (believing him to be the devil) before fleeing to France, where he was arrested after another attempted murder. Dadd was locked up in England for the rest of his life, first in Bethlem Hospital and then in Broadmoor Asylum. Using art as a form of therapy, he continued to paint during the 42 years he remained recluded.

The unfinished painting, regarded today as Dadd's masterpiece, is populated by a profusion of tiny figures: elves, fairies, dwarves, mythological characters and extravagant creatures of fantasy, all mesmerized in the middle of a forest. In his strange alliance of hypnotic magic and realistic detail, Dadd is almost a Surrealist *avant la lettre*. All the characters portrayed are in a state of expectation, waiting for an imminent event. Spell-bound, they gaze at an empty space, the only clearing amid the undergrowth. All gazes intersect at a point in the centre of the clearing where there is a hazelnut: the point of convergence. Next to the nut, with his back turned towards us, the Fairy-Feller of the title clutches an axe raised and suspended in the air (note the first of many puns: the Fairy-Feller is both a fellow and a feller, and what he fells are fairies, imaginary creatures). Paz puts forward the hypothesis that this figure is Dadd himself and that what we are contemplating is a ritual or symbolic repetition of the original act of parricide (the painter's very surname – Dadd – contains within it the English word for father: Dad), but there is one important difference: the original act of parricide cast the spell and unleashed the trance of confinement whereas this imminent act will break the spell, just as the axe will split the nut (another linguistic pun: in colloquial British English "nut" (the hazelnut) also means both "head" and "someone who is mad"). The nut is his father's head and also a projection of his own head, the head of a madman.

10 From an anonymous review published in *Art Union*, quoted by Patricia Allderidge (1974: 15). For biographical information on Dadd and his family and for a general view of his work I am deeply indebted to this book.

With its intense atmosphere of hypnotic fascination, the painting creates a dramatic sense of expectation: the constant threat of imminence. The gaze, the obsessive contemplation of the Other, the Orientalist who identifies fascination with madness: all of this is the source of what one art critic has called the "mesmerising power" of this work (Allderidge 1974: 29). The same critic adds the following observation: "The microcosm is itself held together by the intense and self-absorbed concentration of its inhabitants – there is no movement and no possiblity of movement, no before or after, the figures are held in a trancelike stillness" (Allderidge 1974: 31).

For Dadd, the painting was perhaps unfinishable because the act of finishing it would break the spell. All eyes are drawn magnetically to the magic object that awaits its own destruction. Time is frozen or suspended in function of the imminent act which is always about to occur, but which never happens, thus maintaining perpetual expectation, permanent anguish. One is reminded of Borges's famous definition of the aesthetic experience in "La muralla y los libros" as "esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce" (Borges 1974: 635). Paz's pioneering interpretation translates the enigmatic visual image into an equally enigmatic verbal text:

> Dadd ha pintado la visión de la visión, la mirada que mira un espacio donde se ha anulado el objeto mirado. El hacha que, al caer, romperá el hechizo que los paraliza, no caerá jamás. Es un hecho que siempre está a punto de suceder y que nunca ocurrirá. Entre el nunca y el siempre anida la angustia con sus mil patas y su ojo único. (Paz 1974: 106)

The reader-spectator glimpses the analogy: just as Dadd's painting supends time and creates an atmosphere of permanent expectation through spatial convergence, so *The Monkey Grammarian* is a text that negates the idea of linear progression or causal sequence in order to create simultaneous analogies with the ultimate goal of reconciliation and liberation. Different times, spaces and genres converge at the moment of writing and reading, and by using the interaction with visual images as part of the text's meaning the author achieves a kind of spatialization of temporal sequence as well as a temporalization of spatial relations. Dadd's painting is a metaphor for the book. Writing and reading are spell-like activities that suspend time and offer the possibility not of identity but of convergence: between East

and West, past and present, self and Other; the reconciliation of poetic equivalence and narrative prose, of temporal text and visual image.[11]

The Monkey Grammarian presents itself as a new kind of text: not as a linear path in time, but as a model of simultaneous convergence in the present, where there are only perpetual beginnings: "No hay fin y tampoco hay principio: todo es centro" (Paz 1974: 133). Governed by the principles of analogy and convergence, this strange and unique text posits its own utopia of writing and reading as pure presence and universal transparency beyond language: "como imagen de la escritura y la lectura como metáfora del camino y la peregrinación al santuario como disolución final del camino y convergencia de todos los textos en este párrafo como metáfora del abrazo de los cuerpos. Analogía: transparencia universal: en esto ver aquello" (Paz 1974: 137). In the intense moments of exaltation and optimism, we witness the ideal triumph of metaphorical equivalence, before the intervention of the critical and ironic intelligence. If analogy and convergence rule, everything can be reconciled, at least momentarily. The experiment is another attempt to forge the conjunction of religion, eroticism and poetry as ritual ceremonies that lead to some form of communion with the Other.

Paz does not idealize India and he refuses to see it as a source of exotic beauty: in this sense his book is a radical deconstruction of the dominant myths of Orientalism.[12] In his first visit to India in 1952 he had experienced the dramatic interior conflict between East and West, registered in the poem "Mutra" as a missed opportunity, a facile opposition that his later work tries to rewrite and transform into dialogue with the Other. Nearly 20 years later, *El mono gramático* offers an impressive tribute to the cultural pluralism of India, forging critical and creative dialogues with the different mythologies, philosophies and religious beliefs of a country that allowed Paz to deepen his sense of literature as liberation and reconciliation.

11 For an alternative reading of Paz's use of Dadd's painting in *El mono gramático*, see Ríos (1979).

12 My reading tends to confirm or even strengthen the observations made by Julia Kushigian about what separates Spanish-American Orientalism from the Anglo-French tradition studied by Edward Said. According to Kushigian, the Hispanic or specifically Spanish-American attitude is marked not by domination and manipulation but by respect for diversity, "openendedness", "its polyglot nature" and "its persistent dialogue with the East" (Kushigian 1991: 14).

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